

Our mental health affects how we think, feel, and act. It involves the brain, body, emotions, and social factors. Did you know 1 in 5 adults have experienced a mental illness? 50% of Americans will meet the criteria for diagnosable mental health condition sometime in their life. Half of these individuals will develop the condition by age 14. Think about this: When we are not feeling well, how long does it take us to go to the doctor? 1 to 2 days maybe? How long does it take for individuals with a mental health condition to seek professional help? Research shows that it takes 10 years! So the 14-year-old with a mental health condition is now 24 years old and may have experienced many negative effects, perhaps even thoughts of suicide.

The three most common mental health diagnoses are depression, anxiety, and ADHD. Research shows that Indiana has the most teens with thoughts of suicide in the nation. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth ages 15-24, and the 10th leading cause of death for all Americans. 90% of those who die by suicide have an underlying mental illness. In addition to a mental health condition, a history of substance abuse is a primary risk factor for suicide. 22% of deaths by suicide involve alcohol intoxication.

Stigma can affect people with substance use and mental health disorders. 75% of people with a mental health disorder have experienced stigma. Of the people that need treatment, only about 19% receive it. Stigma causes people to feel ashamed of their condition and presents barriers to seeking treatment. This can prove to be life-threatening to an already vulnerable person. Understanding stigma is the first step in removing it:

1. Be aware of your language. Labeling a person and defining them by their disease is harmful. People are not their disease.
2. Listen, don't judge. Telling people that they "just need to try harder" or "it's just a phase, you'll feel better soon" belittles the seriousness of their condition. Listen and be compassionate instead of passing judgment.
3. Treat people with mental health issues and substance use disorders with dignity, respect, and kindness. Understand that their disease is out of their control. Your reaction to them, however, is in your control.

For individuals who are victims of stigma, talk openly about mental health. If you are willing to share your personal story, it may help someone else find their voice. There's no shame in seeing a therapist or psychiatrist. Mental health issues and substance use disorders are medical conditions for which you are seeking appropriate treatment. It's no different than a person with any other medical condition.

Research shows that the biggest help to someone with a substance use or mental health disorder is having at least one other person to talk to who will be supportive. The willingness to listen and to help rekindle hope can make all the difference.

For more information, please visit our website at drugfreeadamscounty.org.